

FRETBOARD MASTERY

**A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE
TO EFFECTIVELY LEARN
THE FRETBOARD IN DAYS**

FRETBOARD MASTERY

Introduction

Learning the notes of the fretboard is one of those things that we know we *should* do but it's often not very high on our list of priorities. The reason being that the guitar is an instrument that we can enjoy without having a clue as to the actual notes that are being played under our fingertips. We are able to rely solely on dots on fretboard diagrams and numbers on a line of TAB to play what we want.

I am hoping that by downloading this eBook you have come to the realisation that, in fact, this is something you *need* to do if you wish to truly develop on the instrument and as a musician generally.

Where to start can be a little overwhelming so I have developed this progressive process that will take you from knowing absolutely nothing about the fretboard to having every single note under your fingertips within a matter of days.

This approach is focused upon learning some basic theory and applying that immediately to the fretboard. This will inform essential patterns and reference points that will accelerate the learning process.

What you need to do is follow through the eBook and be implementing the new nugget of fretboard visualisation technique that I present with the suggested exercises at each stage.

All this culminates in what I believe are the best exercises to add to your practice routine to have the notes memorised over a few practice sessions. These are exercises I used myself and teach all my students, with amazing results.

Are you ready? Then let's do this!

Ry Naylor

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P.S. The content of this eBook is explained in much greater detail in my video course, '[Guitar Rut Busters: Essential Theory](#)' which covers fretboard memorisation and essential guitar music theory. Find out more about the course and my other premium content over on my website.

FRETBOARD MASTERY

1. Naming the strings with the 'musical alphabet'

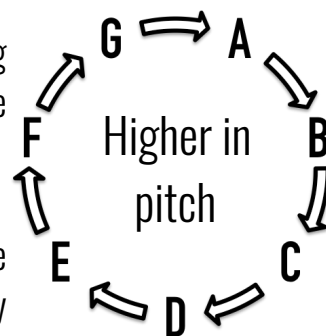
Pitch in music is highness or lowness in the sounds we hear as we play. **Notes** are the written representations of these different pitches.

The way in which we name the different notes in music is with an alphabet; the **musical alphabet**. This begins in the same way as the standard English alphabet:

A, B, C, D, E, F, G

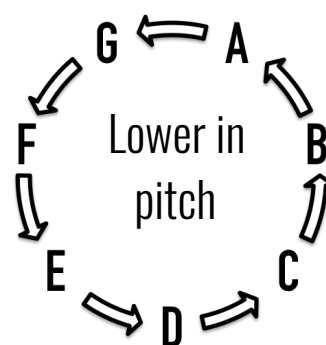
But the musical alphabet only contains seven letters. After G we return back to an A, but this A will be higher in pitch than the A upon which we started.

I like to think of the musical alphabet as a continuous circle. Moving clockwise makes the notes higher in pitch, and moving anticlockwise makes the notes lower.

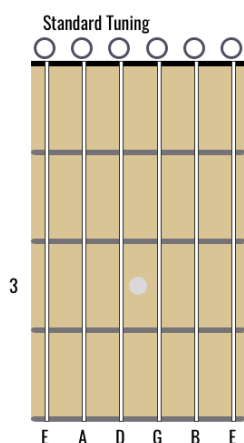


We can very easily recite the alphabet in order, but you also need to have it memorised backwards as music can be played in either direction. Try saying a few rounds of each circle to get used to this.

The distance (or **interval**) between A to A (or B to B, C to C...) is said to be an **octave**. The prefix *oct-* referring to the 8 notes that make up one octave (A B C D E F G A).



It is from the musical alphabet that we can label the guitar strings by the note they are tuned to.



We tune the strings as follows: 6(**E**), 5(**A**), 4(**D**), 3(**G**), 2(**B**) and 1(**E**). There is a **two octave** distance between strings 6(E) and 1(E) (i.e. two full rotations around our alphabet circle). There are lots of different mnemonics to help remember the string note names, in which the first letter of each word is the note to which we tune the strings. My favourite that I always share with my students is:

Eddie Ate Dynamite Good Bye Eddie

FRETBOARD MASTERY

The open strings are my first **reference point**. These reference points will be areas of the fretboard where you can be extremely confident of the note names in order to find notes around them whilst you're developing your fretboard memorisation.

The Open Strings

Diagram illustrating the open strings (E, B, G, D, A, E) and fret markers (3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21) on the fretboard.

Musical notation for the open strings, showing a treble clef and a bass clef with notes on the open strings.

TAB 0 0 0 0 0 0

2. Knowing the musical alphabet up and down a string

We are now going to lay out the musical alphabet *horizontally* up one of the guitar strings. As the alphabet starts with the letter A, we shall do this on string 5(A). See how we are going higher in pitch as we move the fretting hand towards the guitar body.

Musical Alphabet on String 5

Diagram illustrating the musical alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A) on string 5 (A) and fret markers (3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21) on the fretboard.

Musical notation for the musical alphabet on string 5, showing a treble clef and a bass clef with notes on the open strings.

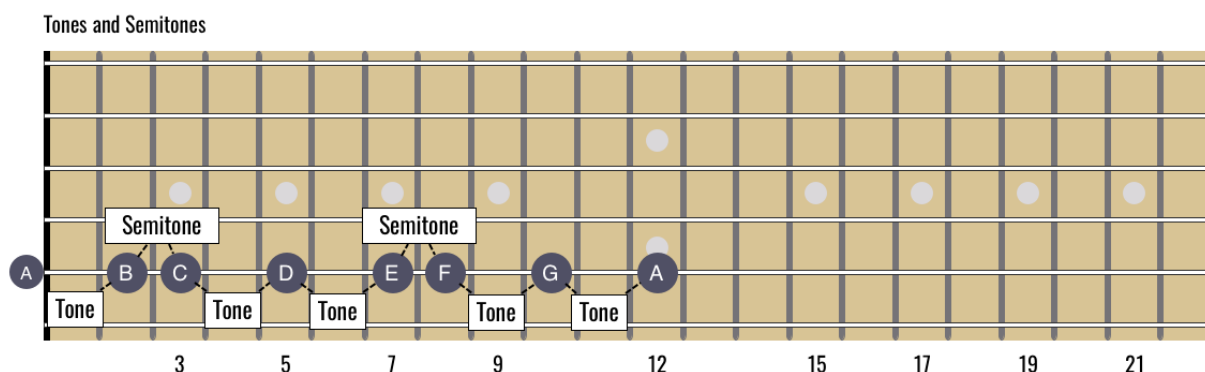
TAB 0 2 3 5 7 8 10 12

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You will see that the notes are not evenly spaced. There is a fret-sized gap between the letters except between B to C and E to F which are immediately next to one another.

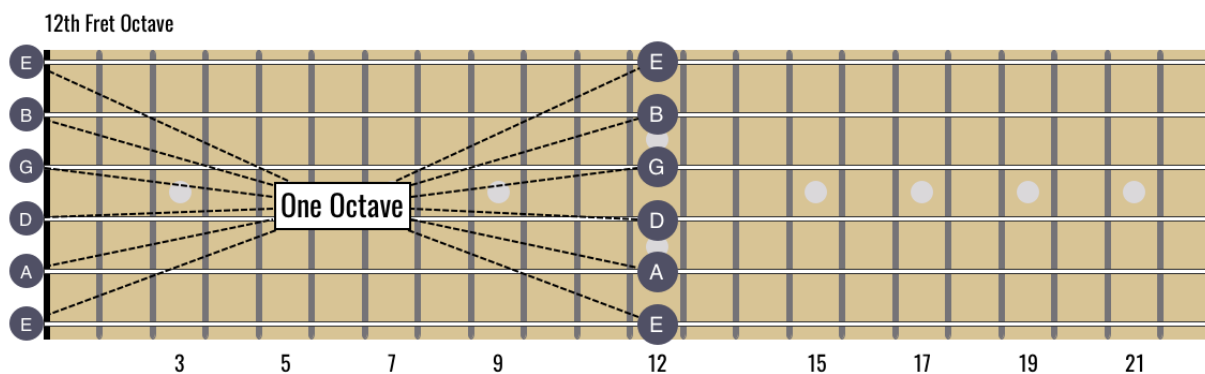
The distance of two frets (e.g. A to B or C to D) is called a **tone** or **whole step** (depending on where in the world you live). I learnt it as a 'tone' so I shall adopt that name going forward.

The distance of one fret (e.g. B to C or E to F) is called a **semitone** or **half step**.



Tip: Two Dots

We are back to the note upon which we started at the 12th fret. This is why there are two inlay dots on the fretboard at the 12th fret to indicate the octave of the open string.



The 12th fret octave is our second **reference point**.

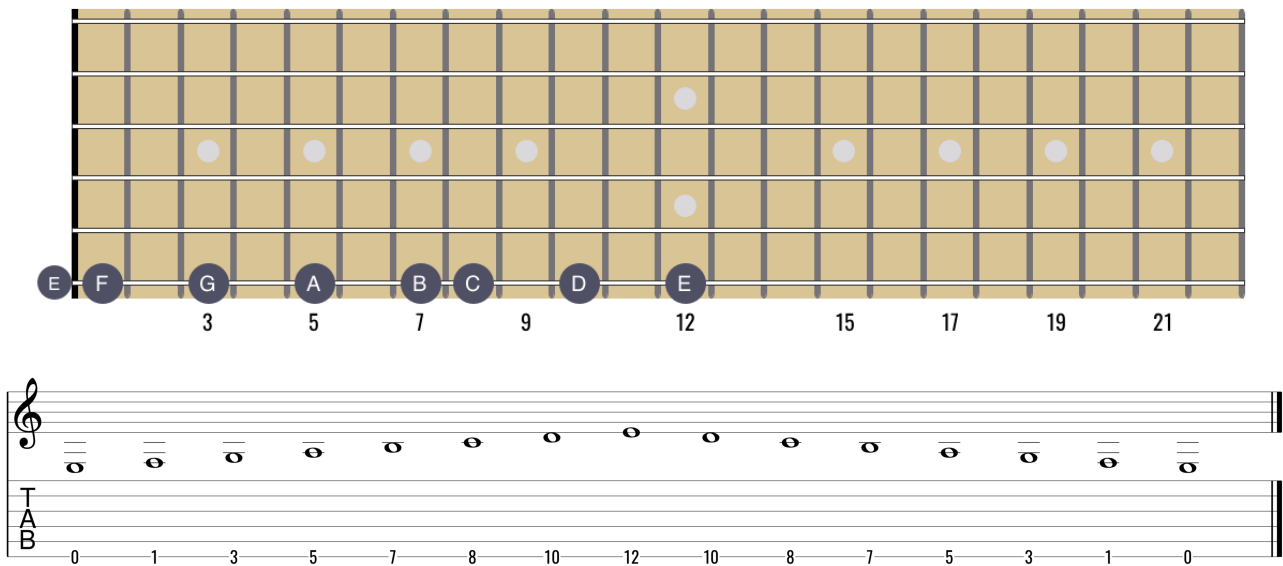
Exercise #1

Play the musical alphabet up and down any string at random and **say the notes as you play them**. Check that you are back at the note you started when you get to the 12th fret.

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Remember that a tone above the open string places the next note in 2nd fret and a semitone would be the 1st fret. For example, if you were to do the exercise on string 6(E), the next note F would be in the 1st fret, being a semitone higher.

Musical Alphabet on String 6(E)



Tip: Two E strings

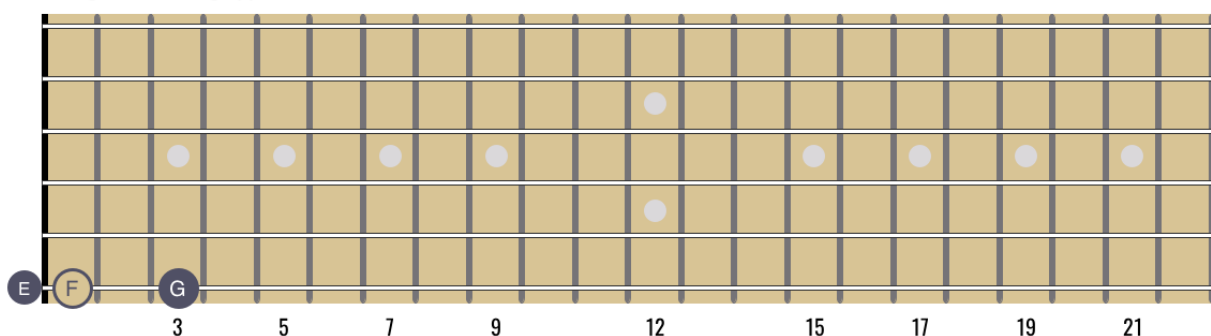
As both strings 6 and 1 are both tuned to the note E (albeit two octaves apart) the layout of the notes horizontally up the strings will be identical. That leaves us with effectively five strings to learn.

Up from the open string or down from the 12th fret?

As you try to find a note on any string, ask yourself: Is the note I'm looking for a little higher or lower than the open string note? If it is a little higher, you can work up from the open string. If it is a little lower, start from the octave at the 12th fret and work downwards towards the nut.

For example, if I want to find a G on string 6(E), G is only two letters up from the E so it would be better to start from the open string and work upwards through the alphabet (E, F, G).

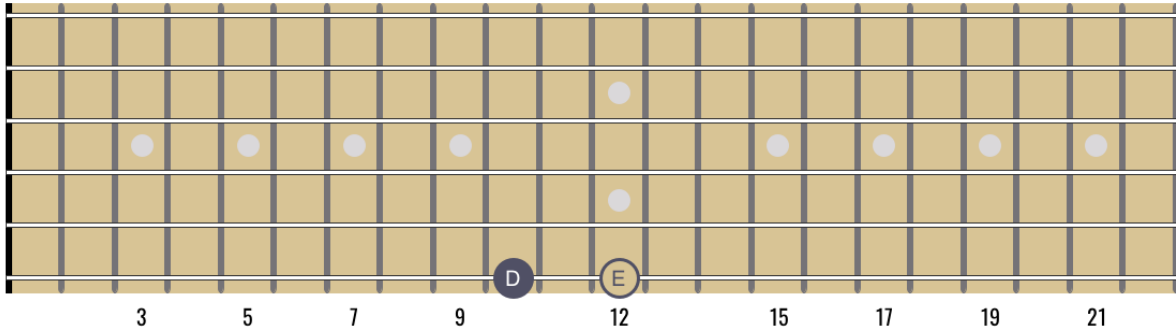
Finding the G on String 6(E)



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However, finding a D on string 6(E), D comes immediately before E in the musical alphabet and so you should work downwards from the 12th fret (E, D).

Finding the D on String 6(E)

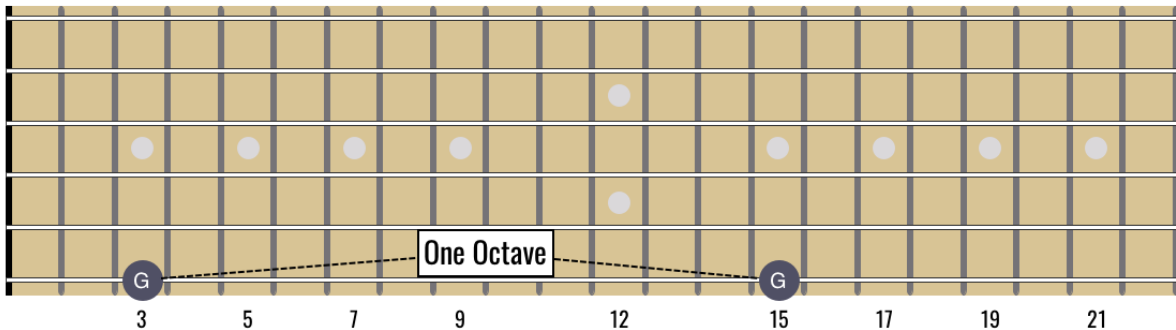


There are fretboard diagrams of all the notes on page 23 to help you with all of the exercises.

3. 12 frets to an octave

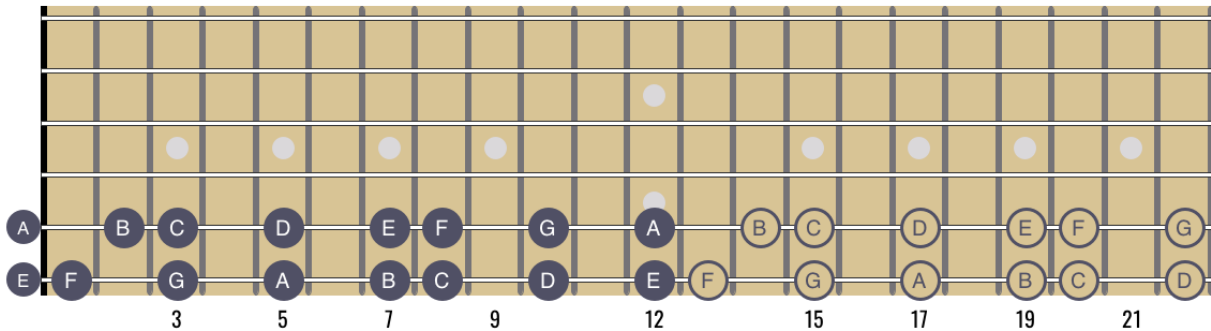
Any note can be found an octave higher on the same string by **adding 12 frets**. For example the G at the 3rd fret of string 6(E) has its octave at the 15th fret.

Finding the same note one octave higher



Beyond the 12th fret (the octave of the open strings), the notes repeat in the same sequence, but sounding one octave higher.

Naming notes beyond the 12th fret



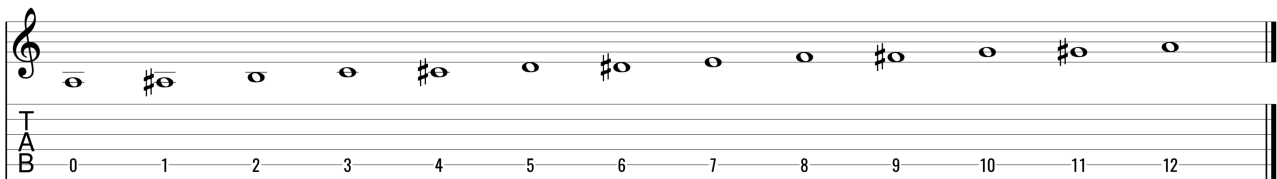
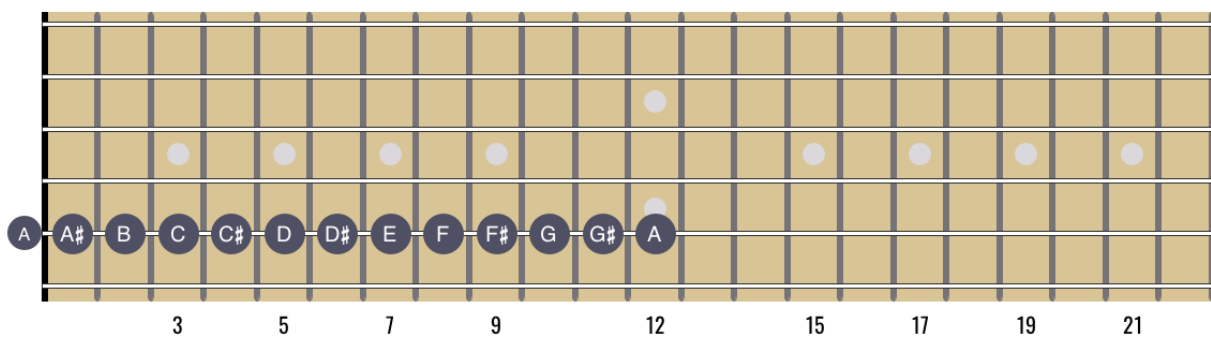
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4. Plugging the Holes

We're starting to see the musical alphabet now, but how do we name the frets that fall between the musical alphabet?

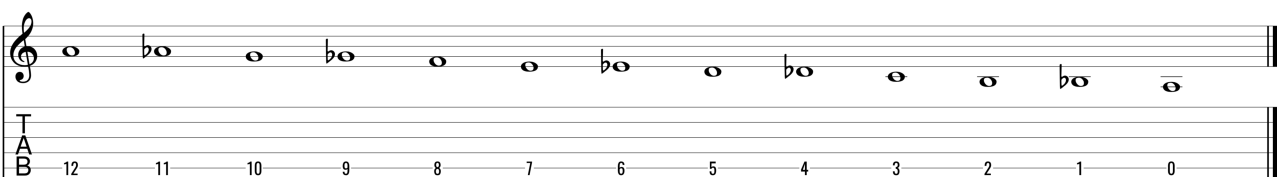
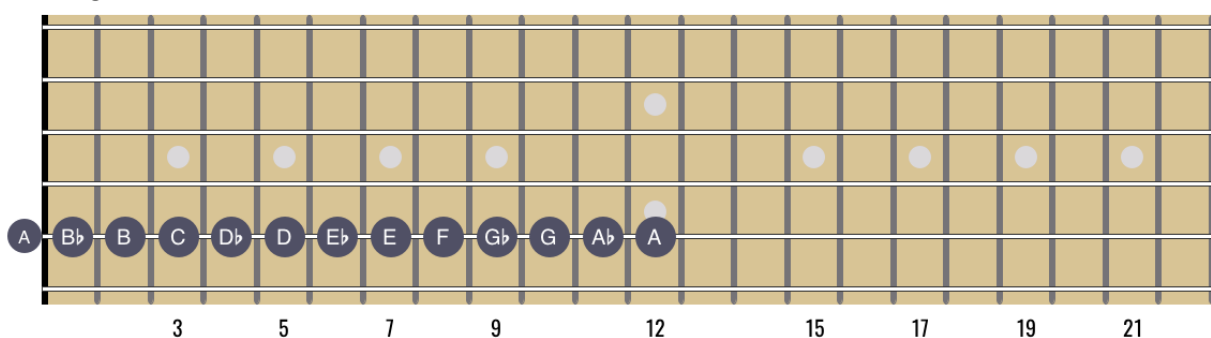
Raising a note one fret towards the guitar body makes the note **sharp** (#) meaning higher in pitch by one semitone. For example, we have a C at the 3rd fret on string 5(A). The note C# ("C sharp") will therefore one fret higher in the 4th fret.

Naming all the notes with Sharp Notes



Lowering a note one fret towards the nut makes the note **flat** (b) meaning lower in pitch by one semitone. For example, we have an D at the 5th fret on string 5(A). The note Db ("D flat") will therefore one fret lower in the 4th fret.

Naming all the notes with Flat Notes

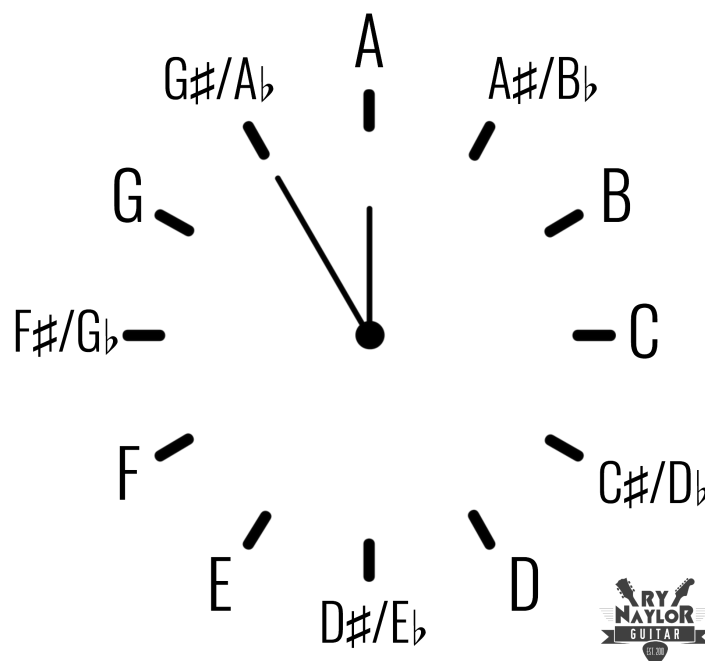


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Two notes which have the same pitch (for example **C#** and **Db**) are called **enharmonic**. Exactly how they are named depends on the key and scale you are using. You will find that you see one name for a note more often than the other (for example we see Bb more often than A#, or F# is seen more often than Gb). That being said, you should be familiar with both possible names for these notes.

Tip: The Note Clock

You can think of the 12 notes in an octave as being like the 12 numbers on a clock face:



Each step around the clock is a semitone or a movement from one fret to the next towards the guitar body. Moving clockwise makes the notes higher in pitch.

Exercise #2

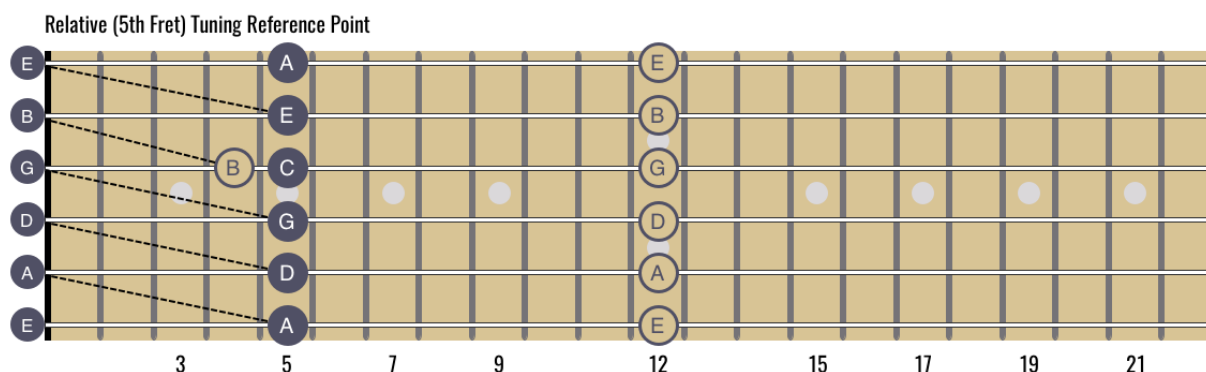
Add these notes to your exercise walking up and down a string. When you go up towards the body name the notes by their sharp names and then descending back towards the nut, use the flat names. You can refer to the note clock to help you with the order of the notes and don't forget the semitones between B to C and E to F.

When you play every single fret up and down to the 12th fret, you are playing a **chromatic scale**.

FRETBOARD MASTERY

4. Relative Tuning Position

The 5th fret tuning position (known as ‘relative tuning’) gives us a third **reference point** in addition to the open strings and the 12th fret octave.



The order of the notes across the strings at the 5th fret is similar to the open strings, but we start from the A note on string 6(E).

There are a couple of little tweaks to remember. There will be a C on the 5th fret of string 3(G) because string 2(B) is tuned by referencing the 4th fret of string 3(G) (a rather infuriating difference that will affect things as we progress).

There will also be an A at the 5th fret of string 1(E) as any note in a given fret on string 6(E) will be the same on string 1 but sound two octaves higher.

Exercise #3

Consolidate your knowledge up to here and, as quickly as you can, identify the notes across the strings in either direction (strings 6-1 and 1-6) at the three reference points, namely:

- Open strings
- 12th fret
- 5th fret

Tip: Always adjust for string 2

When moving any chord, scale or interval shapes across the string sets, any note that is moved from string 3(G) to string 2(B) must be **raised** up one fret towards the guitar body for the relationship of the notes to remain the same. We will see many examples of this as we progress.

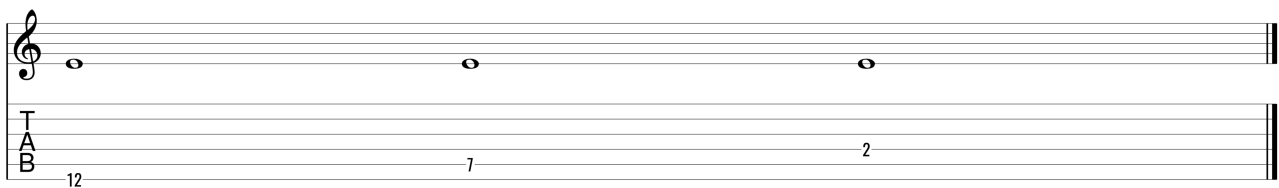
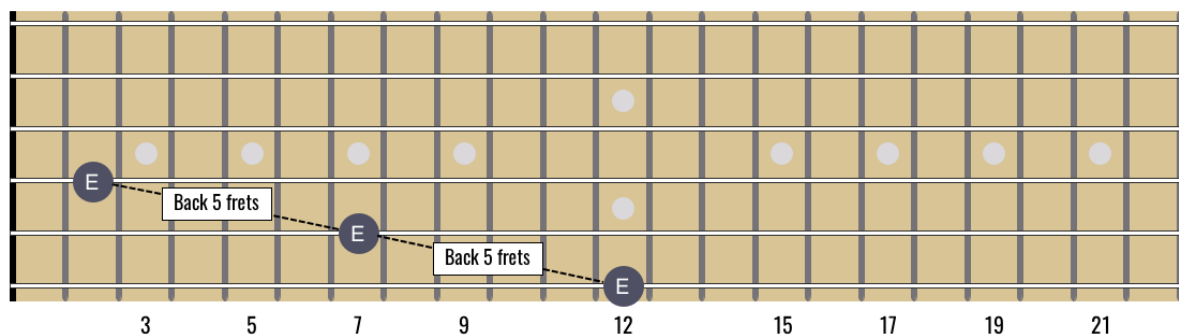
FRETBOARD MASTERY

5. Finding the same note on adjacent strings

From the tuning position we see that we can find the exact same note (or **unison**) by going back 5 frets towards the nut on the string immediately below as we look down across the strings towards the floor. This shift can be applied from any note at any fret.

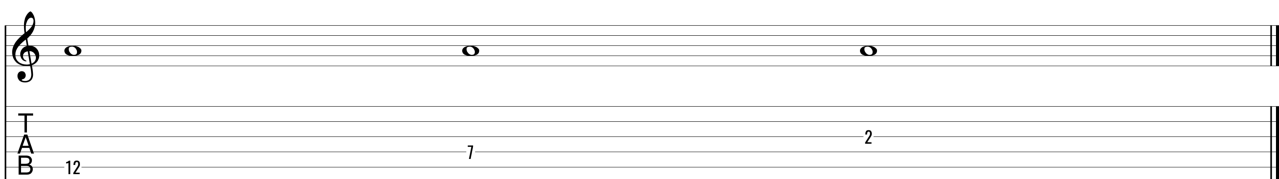
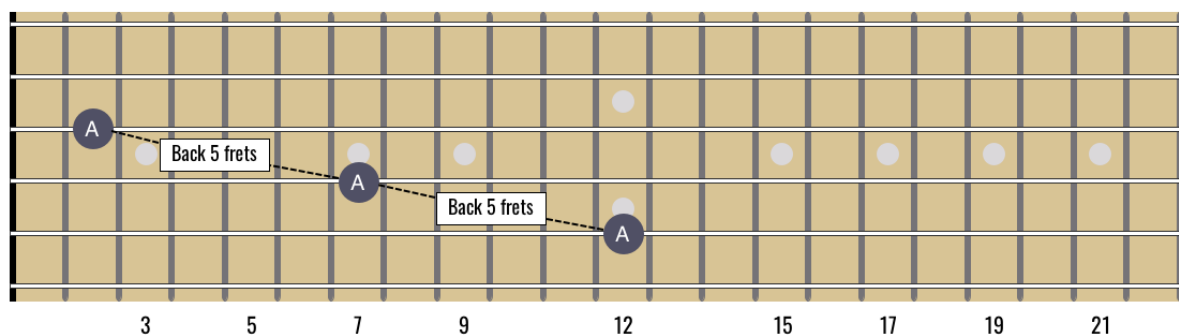
For example, the octave E at the 12th fret of string 6(E) can be found at the 7th fret of string 5(A) or the 2nd fret of string 4(D).

Finding the same note (Unison)



This unison pattern can be immediately shifted onto the next set of three strings.

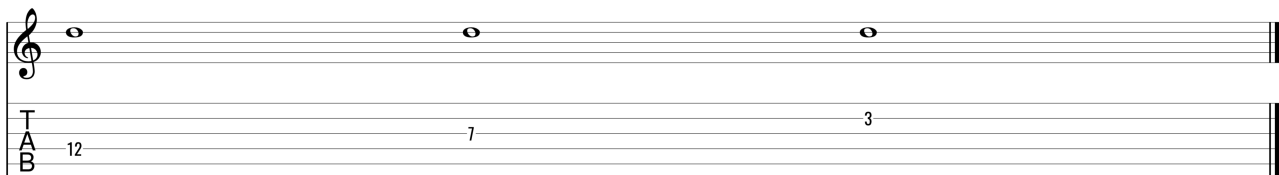
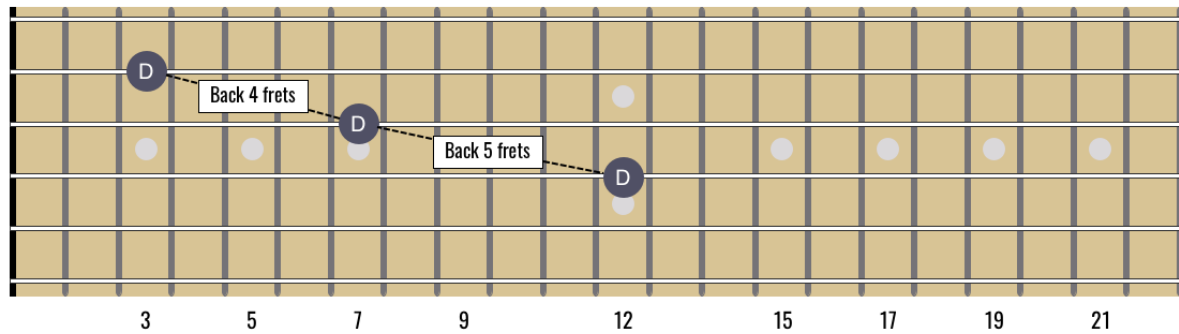
Finding the same note (Unison)



FRETBOARD MASTERY

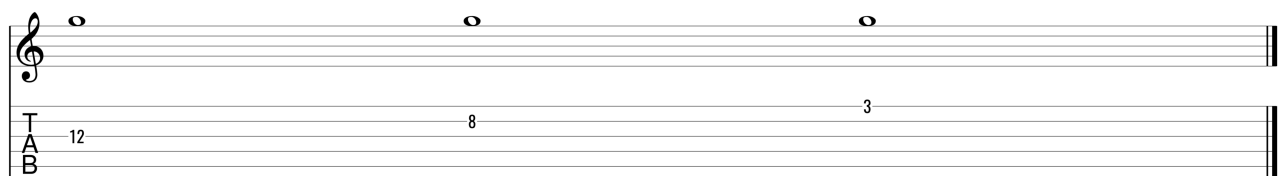
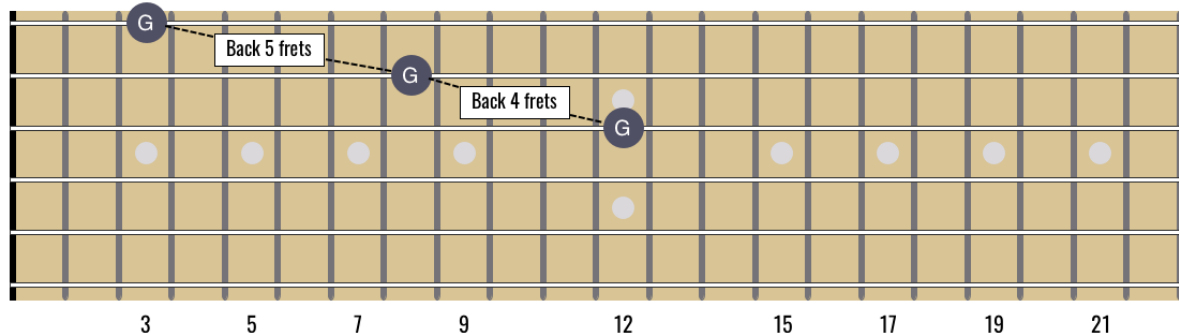
Remember that string 2(B) was tuned from the 4th fret of string 3(G). So as we move the pattern across to the next set of strings, the same note will be found **4 frets back** towards the nut between strings 3(G) and 2(B).

Finding the same note (Unison)



Moving across to the final set of three strings:

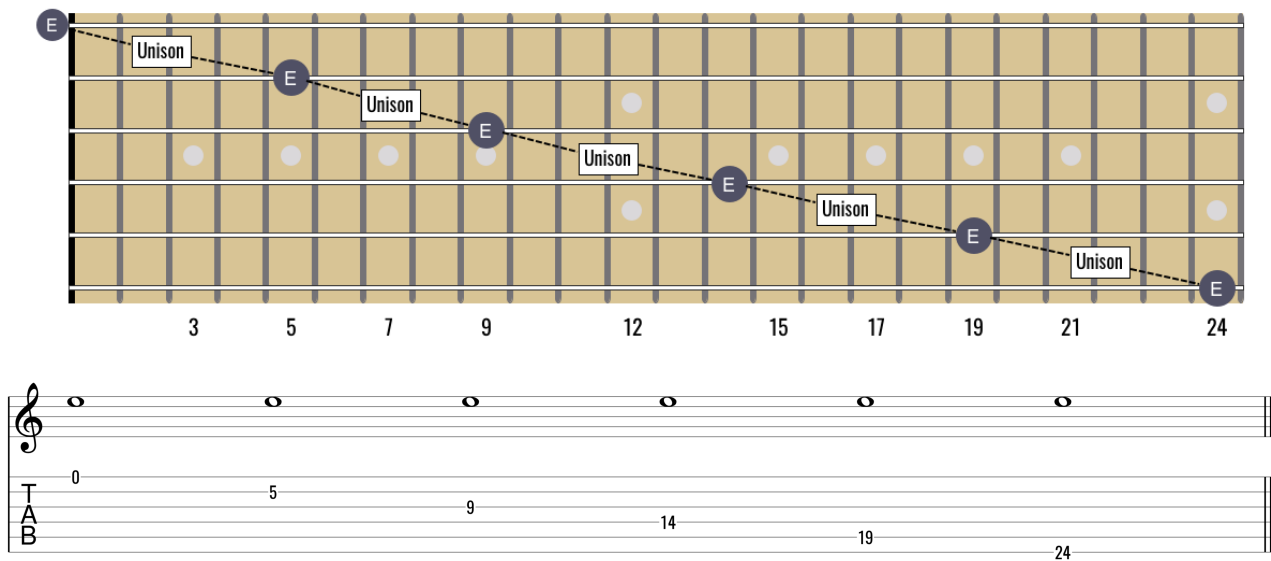
Finding the same note (Unison)



You can extend these patterns across the entire fretboard and see that (on a guitar with 24 frets) the open string 1(E) can be played across all 6 strings.

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Finding the same note across the entire fretboard

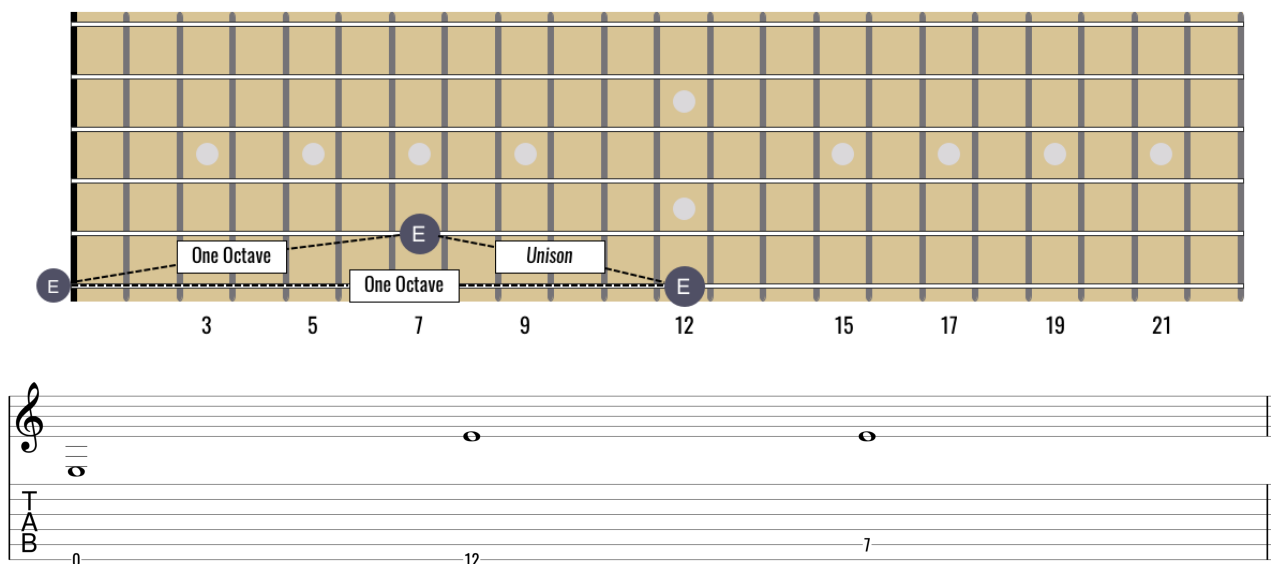


I would argue that this is one of the main reasons that tablature (TAB) is indispensable for the guitar player.

6. 7th fret octave

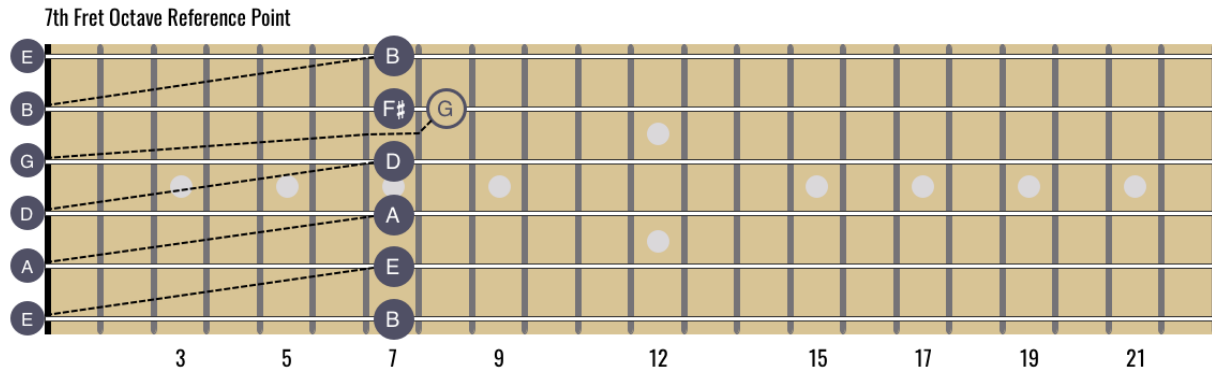
We saw that the octave E on string 6(E) was at the 12th fret. That same note could be found at the 7th fret of string 5(A).

7th Fret Octave



Any note can be found one octave higher on the string below by going up 7 frets and provides another useful reference point that resembles the order of the open strings (just like the relative tuning reference point).

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Again, we would need to adjust the octave shape between strings 3(G) and 2(B) by raising the note an additional fret on string 2(B), making the octave up 8 frets. The note in the 7th fret will therefore be an F#.

We will also find a B at the 7th fret of string 6(E) because we have the same note at the same fret on string 1(E).

Exercise #4

Memorise the order of the notes across the strings at the 7th fret as another **reference point**.

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7. More Octave Shapes

Again, thinking about the octave of the open string 6(E), we saw that it could be found on the 2nd fret of string 4(D).

6-4 Octave (E)

One Octave

3 5 7 9 12 15 17 19 21

0 2

0 2

This octave shape exists between strings 6(E) and 4(D) from any fret. For example, we know that the 5th fret of string 6(E) will be an A (think relative tuning) and so there will be an A one octave higher at the 7th fret of string 4(D):

6-4 Octave (A)

One Octave

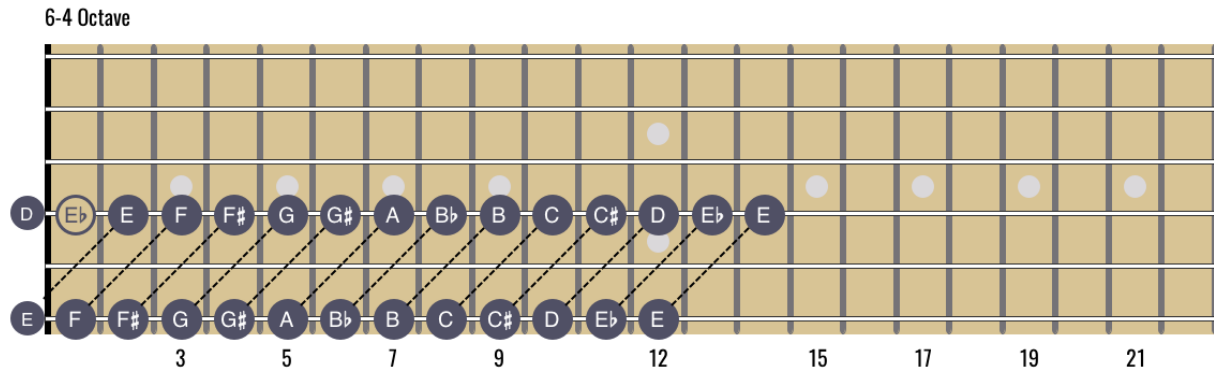
3 5 7 9 12 15 17 19 21

5 7

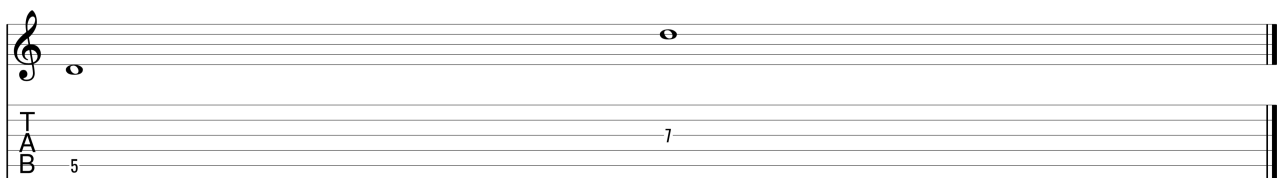
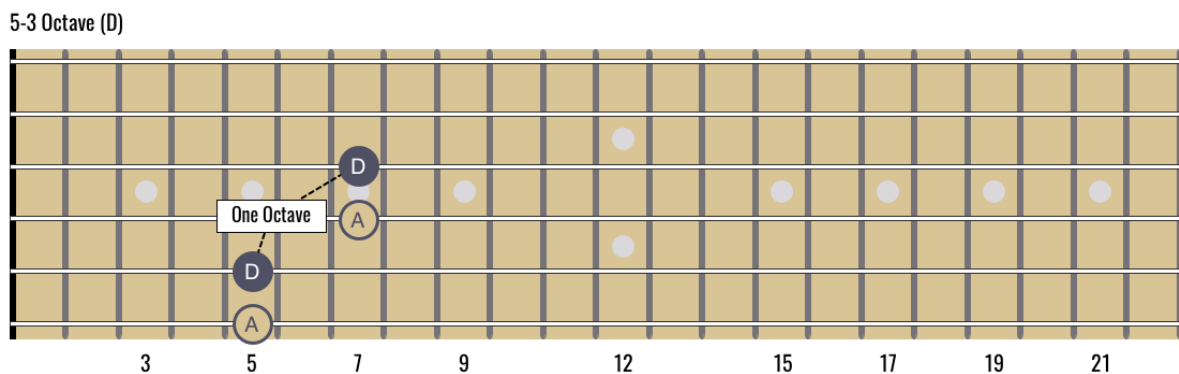
5 7

FRETBOARD MASTERY

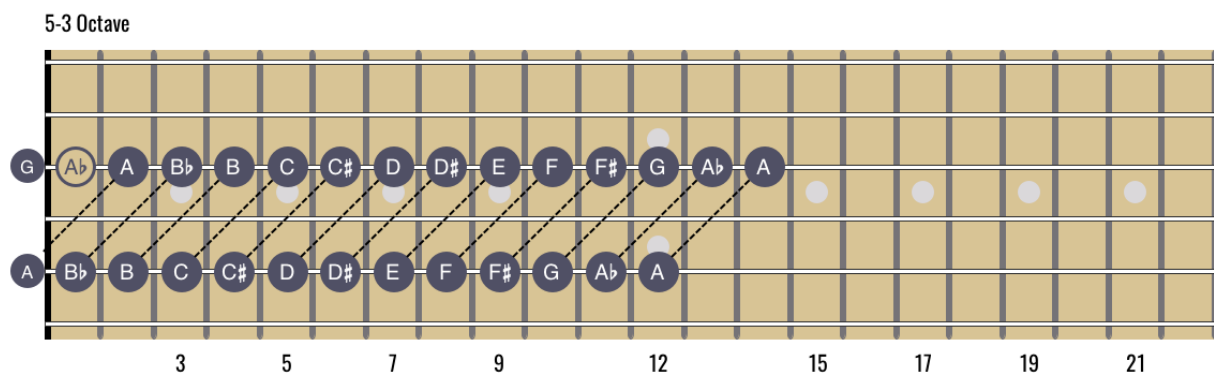
This gives us an easy way to name notes on string 4(D) from string 6(E). The octave of any note played on string 6(E) will always be **two frets higher** (towards the guitar body) on string 4(D):



This octave shape can then be moved across the strings for a 5-3, octave shape:



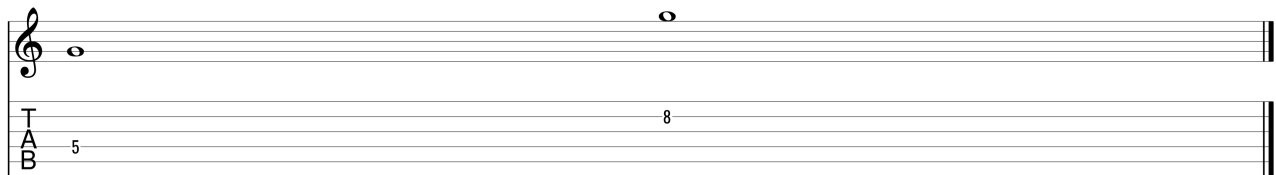
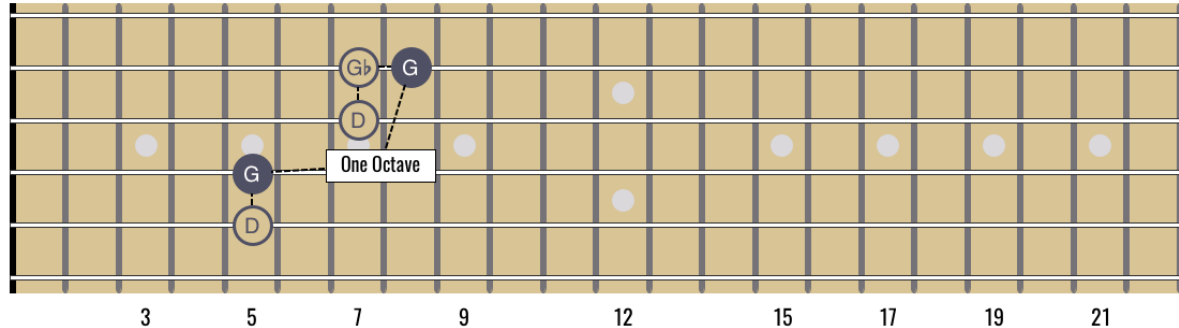
Again, the octave of any note played on string 5(A) will always be **two frets higher** (towards the guitar body) on string 3(G):



FRETBOARD MASTERY

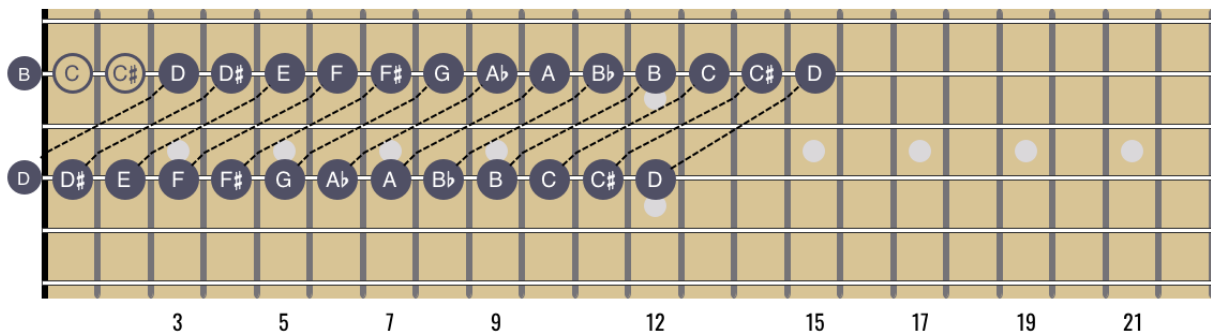
Remember that when moving any shapes across the string sets, any note that is moved from string 3(G) to string 2(B) must be raised up one fret towards the guitar body to maintain the same distance:

4-2 Octave (G)



So for the 4-2 octave shape, the note moving from string 3(G) to 2(B) must be raised one fret (towards the guitar body) for the octave to be intact. The octave of any note played on string 4(D) will always be **three frets higher** on string 2(B):

4-2 Octave



FRETBOARD MASTERY

Moving the octave down for a 3-1 octave shape, the pattern remains the same as no note has crossed from strings 3(G) to 2(B):

3-1 Octave (C)

One Octave

3 5 7 9 12 15 17 19 21

5 8

TAB

The octave of any note played on string 3(G) will always be **three frets higher** on string 1(E):

3-1 Octave

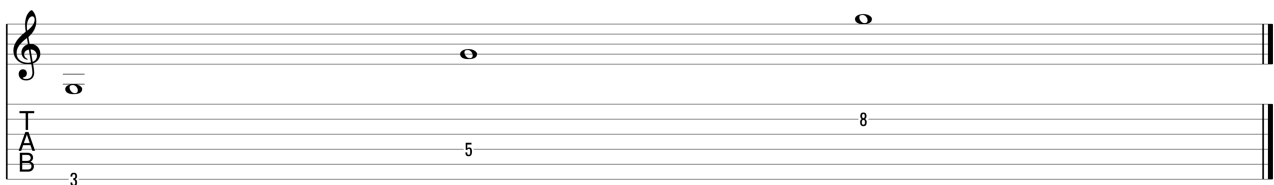
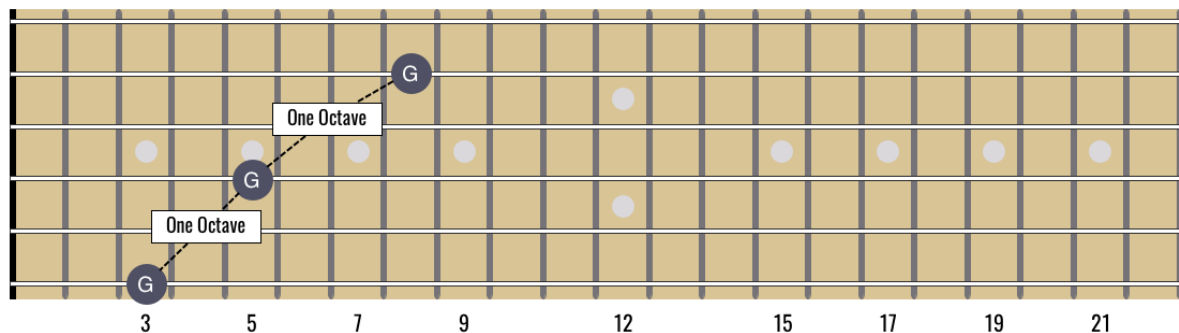
3 5 7 9 12 15 17 19 21

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8. The 3-Octave Patterns

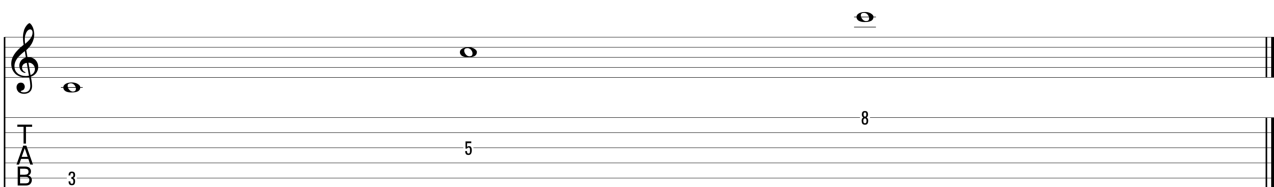
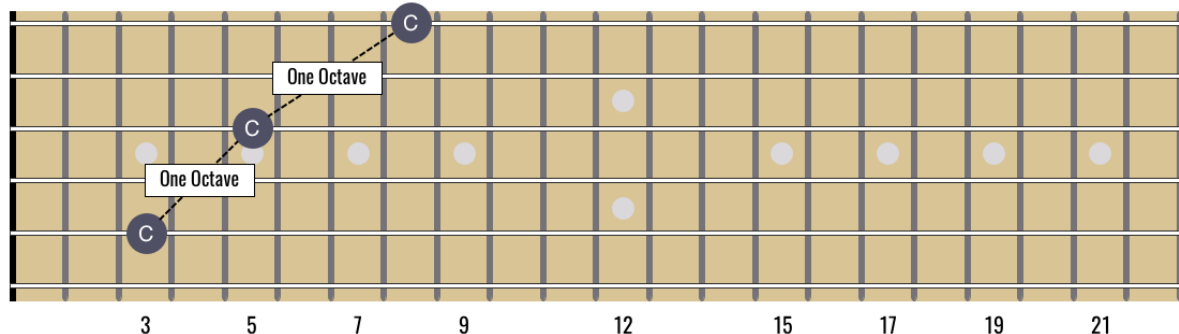
Taking the previous octave shapes, we can link them up to make two 3-octave patterns across the fretboard. If we start from string 6(E) we can find three octaves of the same note by linking up the 6-4 and 4-2 octave shapes:

The Three Octave Pattern (6-4-2)



In a similar way we can start from string 5(A) and link up the 5-3 and 3-1 octave patterns.

The Three Octave Pattern (5-3-1)



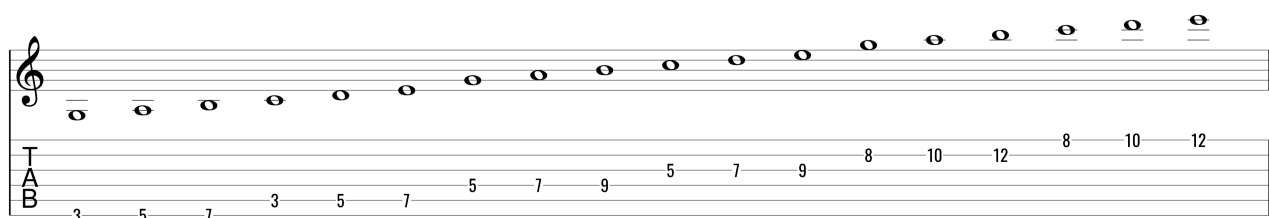
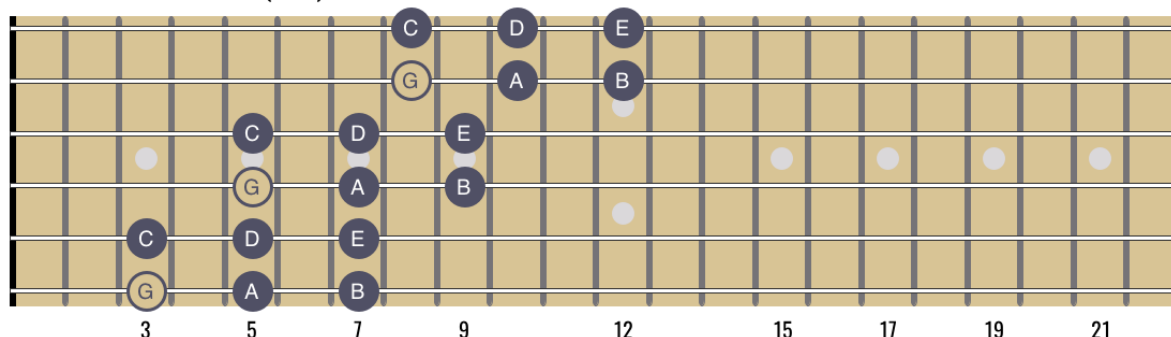
We can really use this pattern to our advantage when playing scalar patterns across the strings.

You can think upon the strings grouped into three string pairs: the low strings (6-5), middle strings (4-3) and high strings (2-1). Applying these octave shapes, any sequence of notes played across the

FRETBOARD MASTERY

low strings can be played an octave higher across the middle strings when the pattern is placed two frets higher. The pattern can be raised a further 3 frets on the high strings.

The Three Octave Scale Patterns (6-4-2)



9. Horizontal Note Finding

Once you are confident with playing the musical alphabet and chromatic scale up and down each string, the next stage in learning the notes on the fretboard will be to play through the notes, but in distances larger than a tone.

This exercise will be finding each of the 12 chromatic notes horizontally on one string. The order of notes that you will play through (below) are 5 semitones apart (i.e 5 frets/5 steps clockwise around the note clock) to ensure that you are jumping around the string.

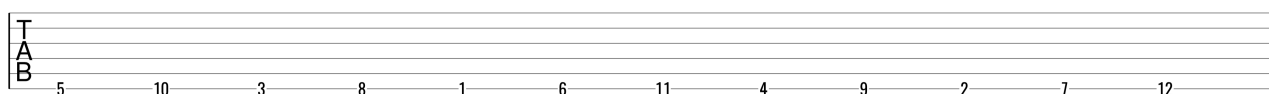
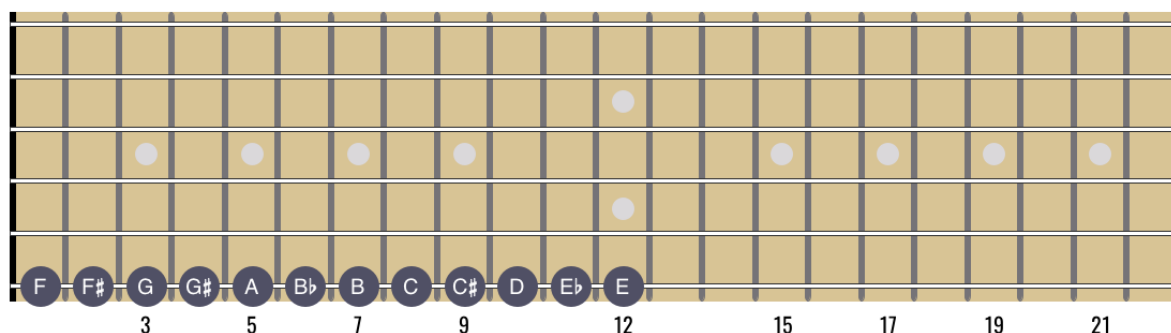
A	D	G	C	F	B \flat	E \flat	A \flat	C \sharp	F \sharp	B	E
					A \sharp	D \sharp	G \sharp	D \flat	G \flat		

Limit yourself to the first 12 frets and if the note is an open string, play the octave at the 12th fret. With the sharp and flat notes, approach them by both their names (i.e. try finding C \sharp in one practice session and then the next time view it as D \flat). Be saying the note names as you play them.

FRETBOARD MASTERY

Here is an example finding the notes on string 6(E):

Horizontal Note Finding on String 6(E)



To add a little pressure and allow you to focus more, try the exercise along with a metronome, playing each note with the click. You can set the metronome at whatever tempo you need to be able to do that and then try and increase it in every practice session or every couple of sessions.

If you are just starting out and the click needs to be very slow (maybe 20-30 BPM) you can double the tempo and try to play every two clicks, or even multiply the tempo by 4 and pick every four clicks. For example if you are working at 20 BPM, set the metronome to 80 BPM and pick a note every four clicks.

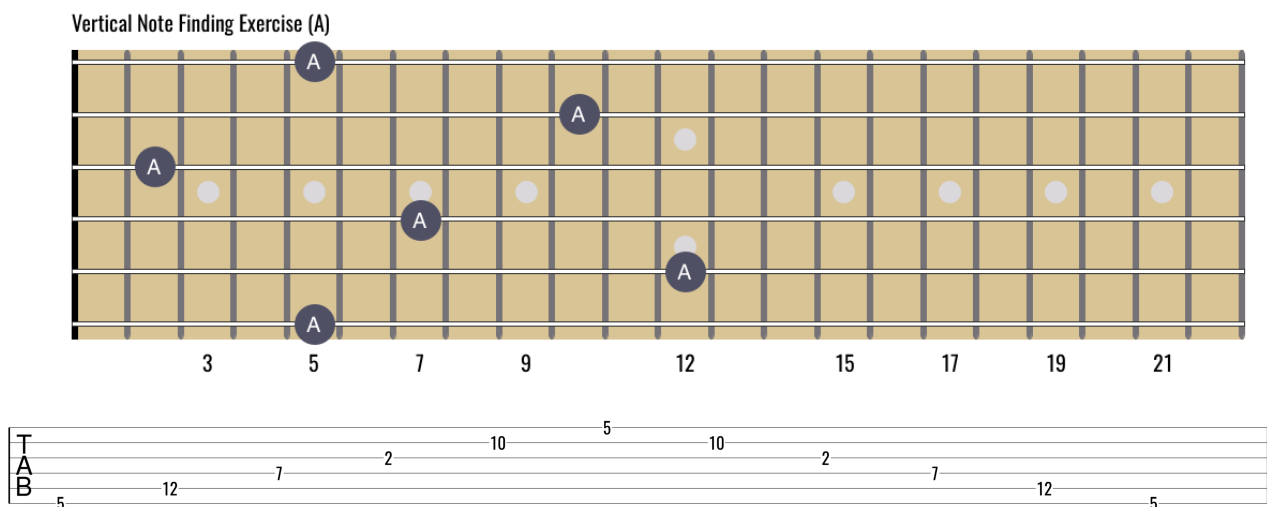
Start each practice session with 5 minutes of note finding. With that time you should be able to try this exercise on each of the 6 strings. Write down the metronome speed that you are able to work with and try to beat it every day.

10. The ULTIMATE Exercise - Vertical Note Finding

The ultimate note finding exercise has you doing a similar thing but extending the note finding vertically across the string set. Again working within the first 12 frets, try and find each note across the strings from string 6(E) to 1(E) and back. You want to do this again with a metronome to help you focus, picking with the click or every 2 or 4 clicks.

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Below is an example of finding all the A notes:



There is a table on page 22 that you can use to note down the BPMs that you are able to play through for each note. There will be some notes that are easier to find than others so you can expect that your BPMs vary across the notes, but your end goal will be to do this as fast as you possibly can.

Conclusion

So there you are! I hope that this book has provided some invaluable insight into the layout of the fretboard to help you in your mission to learning all the notes.

I have added full fretboard diagrams with a more printer-friendly version on page 24. You can print these off to refer to whilst you're reviewing the concepts and doing your note-finding exercises.

There are also some blank fretboards on page 25 that you can print off to be practising your note finding whilst your away from your instrument if you find you have any pockets of time in your day at work or on your daily commute.

I hope that I have explained everything clearly but I am always available to take any questions or feedback by email: contact@rynaylorguitar.com.

Put in the time and I guarantee you will see results. Good luck!

FRETBOARD MASTERY

[illegible]

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Notes on the Fretboard

Notes on the Fretboard (Sharp Notes)

E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D
B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C
A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G
E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D
			3		5		7		9		12		15		17		19		21			

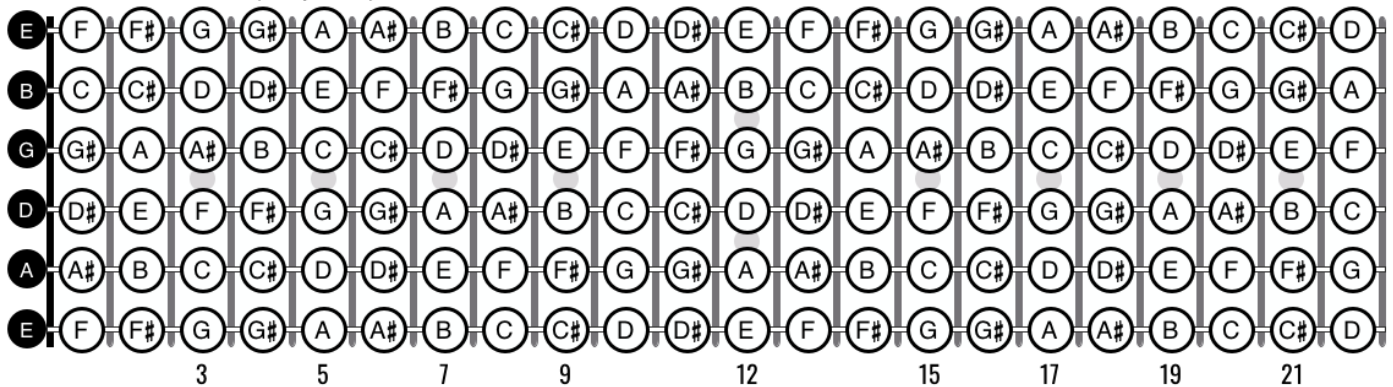
Notes on the Fretboard (Flat Notes)

E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D
B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A
G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F
D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C
A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G
E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D	Eb	E	F	Gb	G	Ab	A	Bb	B	C	Db	D
			3		5		7		9		12		15		17		19		21			

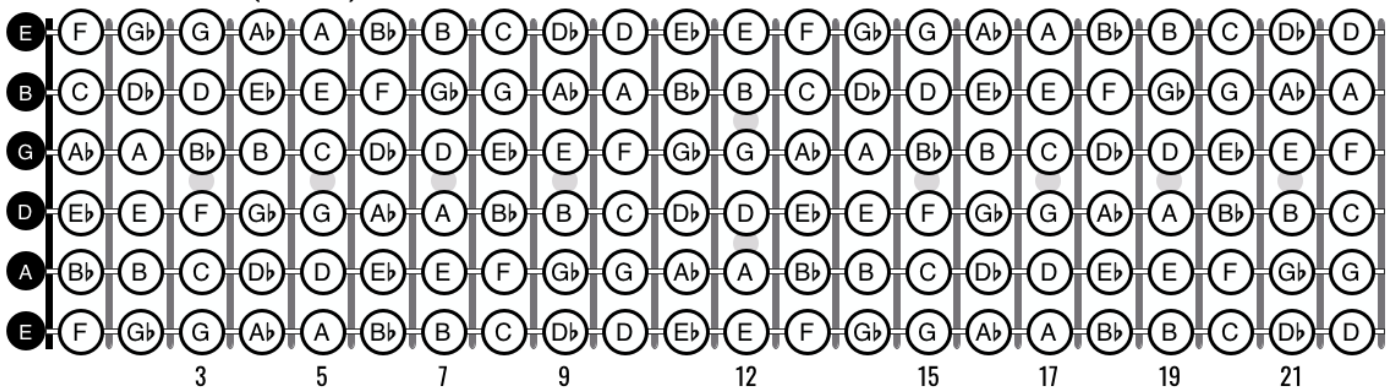
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Printer-friendly Fretboards

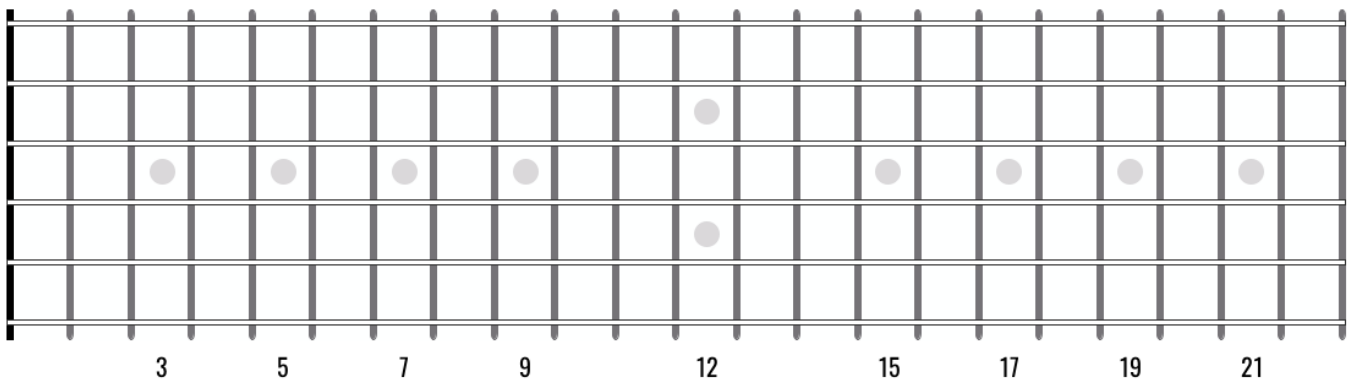
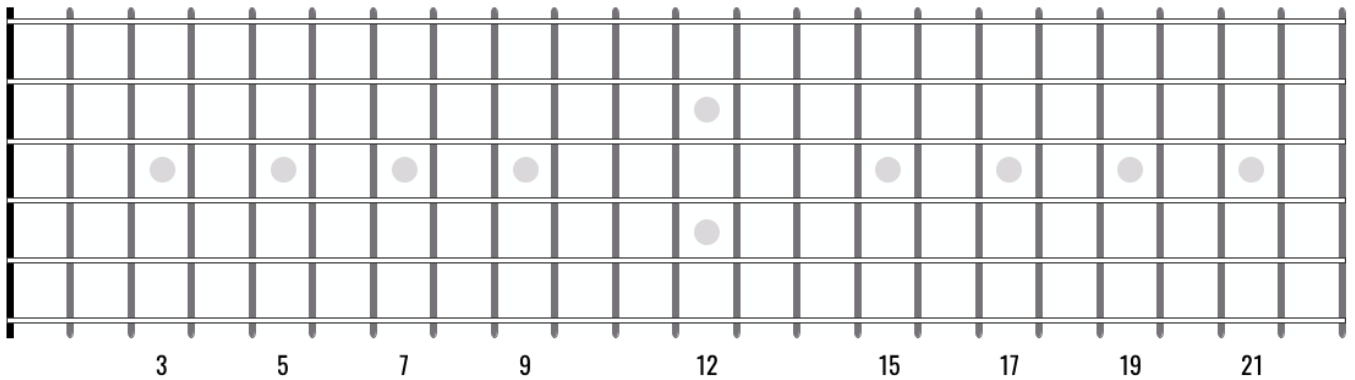
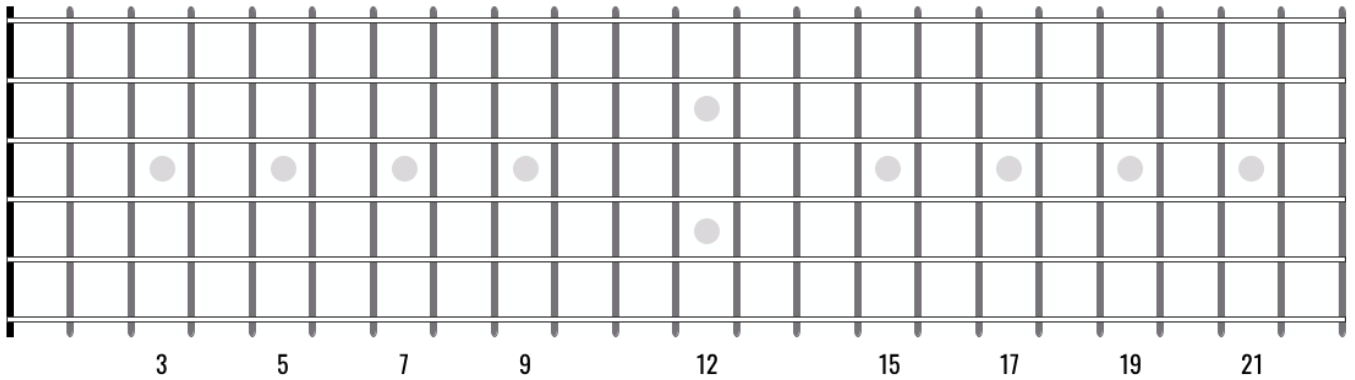
Notes on the Fretboard (Sharp Notes)



Notes on the Fretboard (Flat Notes)



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